CHAPTER 2

The Heritage of Ibn Sīnā's Concept of the Self

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If the historical importance of a philosopher is measured by her influence, Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Sīnā (Latin Avicenna, d. 1037 CE) should merit an uncontested entry in even the narrowest of canons. The development of Islamic philosophy and theology in the so-called post-classical period, that is, from the twelfth century CE down to the dawn of the postcolonial era, is unthinkable without him. By the same token, the Latin translations of a portion of his works were pivotal for the scholastic renaissance of Aristotelian philosophy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and many Avicennian ideas, such as his modal metaphysics and its theological implications or his theory of the so-called internal senses, resounded deep into the modern era, long after his texts had ceased to be immediate sources of inspiration for the mainstream of philosophy.

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But even apart from historical importance, I would like to claim that Ibn Sīnā deserves a position in the brief canon of philosophy simply for the depth and precision of his insight. An illustrative example of this is his perspicuous description and solid analysis of psychological phenomena, and especially those related to the human, or rational, soul. This was the field in which he made some of the bravest departures from the Aristotelian tradition he built on, and in many ways it can be seen as the culmination of his study of nature.[1] One of the most impressive results of this work is his conception of a self who is constantly self-aware.

1 The Flying Man

The natural place to begin an account of Ibn Sīnā's notion of a self-aware self is its curious application in the very first chapter of his exposition of a broadly conceived Peripatetic psychology—that is, the psychological section of *The Cure* (*al-Shifāʾ*). The phenomenon comes to the fore in the famous thought experiment to which the scholarship refers as the floating or the flying man.[2] The argument is designed to provide evidence for the question of whether the soul, which is primarily known from the effects of its animating activity in living bodies, should be conceived of as an enmattered form or potency in the living body, or as the body's perfection of actualized life. Ibn Sīnā prefers the latter alternative, because unlike "form" and "potency," which denote a material substance and a material capacity, respectively, "perfection" (Ar. *kamāl*, Gr. *entelekheia*) denotes a function (in this case life and all that belongs to it), leaving open the question of the metaphysical status of the entity that acts as its causal principle. By means of the flying

1 See Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 288–96.

2 The title derives from Étienne Gilson, "Les sources gréco-arabes de l'augustinisme avicennisant," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 1 (1929): 5–149.

man, he can then argue for the possibility of two metaphysically very different kinds of soul that nevertheless account for the same perfection of life: enmattered forms for plants and nonhuman animals, and immaterial substances for human beings—an option he eagerly seizes.[3]

But mere possibility is scarcely a reason for subscribing to psychological substance dualism, particularly when all the evidence for the existence of souls is provided by the activities characteristic of living *bodies* (growth, digestion, procreation, perception, voluntary movement). It is to meet this challenge that Ibn Sīnā introduces the flying man, that is, in order to point at pretheoretical empirical evidence, readily available to any subject endowed with sound understanding, for the independence of the human soul from its body:[4]

> So we say: One of us must imagine himself so that he is created instantaneously and perfect but with his sight veiled from seeing external [things] . . . floating in air or in a void so that the resistance of the air does not impact him—an impact he would have to sense—and with his limbs separated from each other so that they neither meet nor touch each other. [He must] then consider whether he affirms the existence of his self [*dhātihi*]. He will not hesitate with affirming that his self exists, but he will not thereby affirm any of his limbs, any of his internal organs, the heart or the brain, or any external thing. Instead, he will affirm his self without affirming for it length, breadth, or depth. If it were possible for him in that state to imagine a hand or some other limb, he would not imagine it as part

3 Ibn Sīnā, *Shifā': al-Nafs*, ed. F. Rahman (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), I.1, 4–16. There are other, more condensed, versions of the flying man elsewhere in Ibn Sīnā, but the point of the argument remains essentially the same. For further discussion, see Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna's 'Flying Man' in Context," *Monist* 69, no. 3 (1986): 383–95; and Dag N. Hasse, *Avicenna's "De Anima" in the Latin West: The Formation of a Peripatetic Philosophy of the Soul* (London: Warburg Institute, 2000), 81–82.

4 For a more extensive analysis of the role and nature of the argument in *The Cure*, see Jari Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy: Avicenna and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 31–37.

> of his self or as a condition of his self. You know that what is affirmed is different from what is not affirmed and that what is confirmed is different from what is not confirmed. Hence, the self whose existence he has affirmed is exclusive to him in that it is he himself, different from his body and limbs, which he has not affirmed. Thus, he who takes heed has the means to take heed of the existence of the soul as something different from the body—indeed, as different from any body at all—and to know and be aware of it.[5]

The point of the thought experiment is clear:[6] once you have bracketed all features of experience that depend on the cognitive organs of the body (Ibn Sīnā here alludes to the eyes, the ears, the nerves in the flesh, the brain, and the heart), you are not left with nothing, for you will still be aware of yourself. Notice that the argument is carefully designed to rule out not just the possibility of actual sense perception but also of any other mental content. The flying man is created instantaneously into his state, which means that he does not have any prior perceptions or thoughts. This means that he cannot entertain any contentful thoughts, for in the Peripatetic framework to which Ibn Sīnā subscribes the soul is a clean slate before it begins to receive perceptual input through its senses. Moreover, the sort of mental content that would be relevant for the cognition of an individual self—imagined representations of oneself or discursive thought by means of such representations—depends on the brain, whose lobes are the respective organs of the cognitive faculties responsible for the production of that content, and so it is crucial for Ibn Sīnā to rule such mental content out completely. For the success of the argument, awareness of oneself must be independent of any mental content whatsoever.

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5 Ibn Sīnā, *Shifāʾ: al-Nafs* I.1, 16. All translations from the Arabic are my own.

6 This, however, does not mean that it is uncontroversial: Hasse contests that the flying man has anything to do with self-awareness (*Avicenna's "De Anima" in the Latin West*, 83–86). For a defense of the present interpretation, see Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy*, 38–41.

To get a better idea of the underlying concept of self-awareness, it is important to note that the argument is not a proper demonstration of dualism. Rather, it aims to point toward something that the reader or the interlocutor can use as evidence in her own attempt at solving the question at hand.[7] Now, if self-awareness is supposed to be not only independent of any mental content but also a piece of evidence that any person endowed with sound understanding should be able to recognize in her own experience by merely focusing her attention, it seems safe to say that Ibn Sīnā took it as an *innate* feature of experience. He clearly rejects the idea that self-awareness is produced by the reflective attention paid to experience in the thought experiment; rather, the thought experiment is a means of pointing out something that was already there. Since self-awareness is not the result of any other cognitive operation either, as is painstakingly argued by the thought experiment, it must be epistemically *primitive*. Finally, if it is independent of any mental content, indeed prior to any mental content, it must be a *constant* feature of human experience.

These three properties place a rather heavy burden on the conceptual basis of the flying man: How likely is it that any concept of self-awareness that presupposes innateness, epistemic primitiveness, and constancy will be welcomed as plausible? Worries of this sort were raised by Ibn Sīnā's contemporaries, as is attested by the posthumous collection of correspondence known as *The Discussions* (*al-Mubāḥathāt*).[8] Ibn Sīnā was thus fully aware of the challenge, and not only that, for he was

7 Indeed, Ibn Sīnā introduces the argument by means of technical terms ("pointing at" [*tanbīh*], "reminding" [*tadhkīr*], "indicating" [*ishāra*], and the corresponding verbal expressions) that refer to his method of "indicative" argument. See Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 346–50; and Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy*, 33–37. This did not stop later authors, such as the commentator ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn Kammūna (d. 1284 CE), from attempting to reconstruct it as a proper demonstration. See Lukas Muehlethaler, "Ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1284) on the Argument of the Flying Man in Avicenna's *Ishārāt* and al-Suhrawardī's *Talwīḥāt*," in *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Y. Tzvi Langermann (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 179–203.

8 For the complex nature and history of this work, see David Reisman, *The Making of the Avicennan Tradition: The Transmission, Contents, and Structure of Ibn Sīnā's "al-Mubāḥaṯāt" (The Discussions)* (Leiden: Brill, 2002). The debates on self-awareness are discussed in J. R. Michot, "La réponse

convinced that his concept of self-awareness was capable of meeting it. In another posthumous work known as *The Notes* (*al-Taʿlīqāt*), he makes a series of striking remarks on self-awareness (*shuʿūr bi-l-dhāt*), claiming explicitly that it is "innate," "natural," and "essential to the soul" and is "not acquired" but "constitutive" of human existence. As soon as a human soul comes to be, he says, it will be aware of itself. Self-awareness is epistemically primary, the soul "is constantly aware, not from time to time," and its awareness of itself is always actual. Indeed, "our awareness of our self is our very existence. . . . Thus, it is not possible for [the self] to exist without awareness of it, given that what is aware of it is its very self, not any other thing."[9]

This repeated identification of self-awareness with the existence of the human soul, or rather, the immaterial human substance, tallies neatly with the flying man. It is precisely the bare existence of ourselves that we should find when we focus on our self-awareness by bracketing all other features of experience. The passage from *The Notes* shows that Ibn Sīnā explicitly subscribes to all of the seemingly problematic consequences of this idea. Yet the question of the plausibility of his concept of self-awareness remains open; or in more exact terms, to what feature of ordinary human experience can Ibn Sīnā point *and* expect it to meet all the aforementioned requirements?

2 The Underlying Concept of Self-Awareness

Considering the prominence of self-awareness in Ibn Sīnā's psychology, it is somewhat puzzling that he never explicitly defines the concept. What is more, apart from the aforementioned passage in the

d'Avicenne à Bahmanyâr et al-Kirmânî," *Le Muséon* 110, no. 1 (1997): 143–221; and Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy*, 80–103.

9 Ibn Sīnā, *Taʿlīqāt*, ed. ʿA. Badawī (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣrīya al-ʿāmma li-l-kitāb, 1973), 160–61. For an English translation of the lengthy passage in its entirety, see Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy*, 52–54.

posthumous *Notes*, it never becomes the focus of a sustained investigation. Instead of that, however, we have three other arguments, which, in addition to what I have already presented from the flying man, can be mined for a reconstruction of the Avicennian concept of self-awareness. Such an approach is not unwarranted, for the broader contexts in which the arguments are embedded make explicit references to one or more of the other arguments, thus constituting a network of cases that Ibn Sīnā seems to have taken to be conceptually interconnected. The questions to ask then are, first, whether the arguments allow us to flesh out a proper concept of self-awareness, and second, whether that concept meets the three criteria of innateness, epistemic primitiveness, and constancy.

(1) The first of these arguments is an intriguing case against a reflective model of self-awareness—intriguing because of its striking similarity with an argument presented in contemporary philosophy of mind by Dieter Henrich and other philosophers in the so-called Frankfurt school.[10] Its most elaborate version can be found in the *Remarks and Admonitions* (*al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*):

> Perhaps you say: I can only affirm myself by means of my action. Then it is necessary that you have an action, a movement or something else, that you affirm. . . . If you have affirmed your action as action in an absolute sense, it is necessary that you affirm an agent of it in the absolute sense, not in a particular sense. [This agent] is your very self. If you have affirmed [your action] as *your* action, you do not affirm yourself through it. On the contrary, your self is part of the concept of your act insofar as it is *your* act. The part is affirmed in the conception preceding it and it is not made any less by being

10 For a seminal version of the argument, see Dieter Henrich, "Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht," in *Subjektivität und Metaphysik: Festschrift für Wolfgang Cramer*, ed. Dieter Henrich and Hans Wagner (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1966), 188–232.

> with it but not through it. Thus, your self is not affirmed through [your action].[11]

The view that Ibn Sīnā refutes here seems perfectly reasonable and is possibly derived from no lesser authority than Aristotle.[12] In this view, an intellectual subject first becomes aware of itself once it pays reflective attention to itself; and if this is the case, then the activity that the subject reflectively attends to was not self-aware to begin with. As a result, self-awareness would not be innate, primitive, or constant. In his reply, Ibn Sīnā does not want to question the possibility of reflection, indeed he elsewhere explicitly states that it is a proximate potentiality (*al-quwwa al-qarība bi-l-fiʿl*) for any self-aware subject, or in other words, something a self-aware subject can engage in at will, by itself and without any external impetus.[13] But he refuses to accept the claim that reflection is the fundamental kind of self-awareness. This is because self-awareness is always *particular* to a determined subject, and in reflecting on its act, the subject should be able to recognize the act as its own. The most primitive type of self-awareness is simply the act's being earmarked to the subject.

Contrary to the flying man, Ibn Sīnā does not here insist on the complete separability of self-awareness from other mental content, such as the subject's awareness of its activity. He merely claims that even if self-awareness only existed together with other content, as a

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11 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, ed. J. Forget (Leiden: Brill, 1892) (henceforth *Ishārāt*), 120; see also *Taʿlīqāt*, 161.

12 Ibn Sīnā may have been thinking of passages like *De anima* 3.4.429b8–9 and 3.4.430a3–9, where Aristotle states that the intellect can reflectively think itself, but only once it has been actualized by thinking of some other object. Another possible source for the contrary view is the Muʿtazilite theologians' remarks on human subjectivity. According to the Muʿtazilites, all that is known is known through its attributes, not in itself, and in the case of the human subject, the relevant attributes would be its acts. For Muʿtazilite approaches to anthropology, see Sophia Vasalou, "Subject and Body in Baṣran Muʿtazilism, or: Muʿtazilite *Kalām* and the Fear of Triviality," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 17, no. 2 (2007): 267–98, especially 275–77. I thank Ayman Shihadeh and Sophia Vasalou for bringing this possibility to my attention.

13 Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, 132; see *Taʿlīqāt*, 160–61; and for discussion, Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy*, 89–102.

necessary accompaniment of some kind, self-awareness could never be reduced to second-order cognition of that content—or in Ibn Sīnā's terms, although self-awareness may figure *with* (*maʿa*) other content, it is not brought into being *through* (*bi*) it. This suggests that self-awareness is not a particular state in the subject's mental life, but rather a ubiquitous aspect of it, namely the aspect of that mental life's being experienced by the subject as its own. This aspect need not be an explicit object of cognition, for Ibn Sīnā recognizes that we can focus on it in reflection and that this brings about a clearly registrable change in our awareness. The point is that there must be something in the unreflected state that allows it to become the focus of *self*-reflection. This feature is its irreducible subjectivity, "mineness," or first-personality, and it is this that Ibn Sīnā means when he speaks of self-awareness.

(2) This reconstruction is corroborated by another theoretical application of self-awareness, a lengthy argument for the unity of the soul that Ibn Sīnā presents in chapter 5.7 of the psychological section of *The Cure*. The soul's unity is problematic for him, because his faculty-psychological approach attempts to explain the soul's various activities by reducing them to basic types, such as growth, digestion, reproduction, voluntary motion, and different types of cognition. In the next stage of analysis, the faculty-psychologist postulates a faculty in the soul corresponding to each basic type of activity, and the resulting system of faculties will then amount to a psychological theory.[14] Now, the problem such an approach generates is how we can return to a unified soul from the multiplicity of its faculties. That we should is strongly urged by our commonplace experience of, for instance, perceiving something and then desiring it. If perception is independent of desire, on what basis can I be said to perceive and desire the *same*

14 For Ibn Sīnā's concise statement of his method of procedure in the case of the internal senses, see *Shifāʾ: al-Nafs* I.5, 43–44.

thing? Moreover, if there is no connection between the objects of the two faculties, why should my perception be explanatory of my desire?[15]

To solve the problem, Ibn Sīnā relies on the very experience that generated it. In closer analysis, the connection between the objects respective to perception and desire is not in the objects, but in the fact that it is the same subject that both perceives and desires: "This single thing in which these faculties are conjoined is *the thing that each of us sees as himself*, and so it is valid that he says 'since we perceived, we desired.' "[16] After a lengthy argument for why this thing seen as oneself cannot be a body, he repeats that "what I refer to in my saying 'I sensed, understood, acted, and combined these attributes' . . . is what I call 'I.' "[17] Finally, having established this subjective connection between the distinct objects of perception and desire, Ibn Sīnā concludes that the psychological term "soul" simply denotes this subject from a certain specific point of view:

> If someone said that you do not know that [the I] is a soul, I would say that I always know it according to the sense in which I call it a soul. I might not know it as designated by the word "soul," but when I grasp what [it is that] I refer to as soul, I grasp that it is that thing and that it is the operator of motive and cognitive instruments. I am ignorant of [the I as designated by the word "soul"] for only as long as I fail to grasp the meaning of "soul." . . . If by "soul" I mean the thing which is the origin of those motions and cognitions that belong to me and that end in this whole [of activity], I know that either it is me in [my exclusive] reality or me as operating this body.[18]

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15 Ibn Sīnā, *Shifāʾ: al-Nafs* V.7, 252–53.

16 Ibn Sīnā, *Shifāʾ: al-Nafs* V.7, 253 (emphasis added). The use of the first person plural in the reported empirical statement is puzzling, but it seems to echo a similar formulation earlier on in the context, where it makes much better sense; later on in the chapter, Ibn Sīnā phrases such sentences consistently in the singular.

17 Ibn Sīnā, *Shifāʾ: al-Nafs* V.7, 256.

18 Ibn Sīnā, *Shifāʾ: al-Nafs* V.7, 256–57.

Ibn Sīnā claims that the experience of being a unified subject counts as valid evidence in psychology, because the leap from the experiential subject to the psychological concept of soul is simply a matter of making the right connection between two vocabularies. Once we learn that the psychological concept of soul denotes the principle of the sort of acts we are aware of performing, we immediately understand that our selves are souls—only that our experience is first-personal, whereas the psychologist observes the acts in the third person. Hence, the experiential correlate of the soul's unity in the argument is the I-ness, or first-personality, at which each perception, desire, or act is anchored. The onus is on precisely the same aspect of experience as in the previous argument.

(3) The third case forms part of Ibn Sīnā's answer to his student Bahmanyār ibn Marzūbān (d. 1067 CE), who was dissatisfied with the flying man and demanded additional argument for the incorporeality of the self. In *The Discussions*, Ibn Sīnā responds with an argument from personal identity:

> The persistence of a numerically one thing is its persistence as numerically one not in terms of its quantity and quality but in terms of its substance. My persistence as a single I in terms of my substantial being [*annīyatī l-jawharīya*], [the fact] that what existed yesterday has not perished or ceased to exist while a numerically other [thing] has come to be, that I am that observer of what I observed yesterday—[all this] is something about which no doubt occurs to me. By the same token, I did not come to be today . . . nor will I cease to exist tomorrow, and even if my time should come tomorrow, I [as an] individual [*shakhṣī*] will not be destroyed so that a substance other than me comes into being. If he whose servant I am is of the opinion that he has come to be today from his simile that was corrupted yesterday, and that he is not that which existed yesterday but new in terms of substance just as he is new in terms of states, let him be of that opinion and

> maintain that view, and let him ask elsewhere for an additional explanation of this proof.[19]

In this addendum, Ibn Sīnā relies on the same phenomenon as in the flying man, but he brings it closer to everyday experience by replacing the alienating features of the thought experiment with attention pointed at the commonplace conviction that we endure as unchanging substances from one day to another. He pits the corresponding experience, of waking up as the same I that went to sleep the night before, against the alternative that there is no connection between the two instantiations of subjectivity. Although he depicts the alternative as little more than a straw man, clearly expecting Bahmanyār to recant in response to the consequences listed in the last sentence, he may have had a real rival theory as his target. From early on, the mainstream of Muslim theologians subscribed to an occasionalist metaphysics that, in order to salvage God's omnipotence, denied any causal or existential connection between momentary states of created beings. Yet, as his resignation toward the end of the passage shows, Ibn Sīnā is not under the illusion that his reference to shared experience qualifies as a definitive refutation of the theologians' view—God could perfectly well create the new me with false memories of the old—but the argument does provide further evidence for our reconstruction of his concept of self-awareness. Here, too, Ibn Sīnā postulates a foundation of primitive first-personality underlying all our experiences and acts. My bare being an I is the thread that connects one day of my existence to the next, and this feature remains unchanged amid the constant fluctuation of my momentary states.

But is this narrow concept of pure first-personality, the bare fact of being an I, capable of fulfilling the three requirements of innateness, epistemic primitiveness, and constancy? Although the question will

19 Ibn Sīnā, *Mubāḥathāt*, ed. M. Bīdārfar (Qom, Iran: Intishārāt-e Bīdārfar, 1371 AH s), VI.403, 147.

likely remain subject to debate, it is nevertheless clear that the narrow kind of self-awareness underlying Ibn Sīnā's conception can be plausibly thought of as an innate and constant feature of human existence. In this framework, innateness and constancy amount to saying that all mental existence is first-personal by essence—a view that is still perfectly respectable, if not uncontroversial.

The question of the epistemic primitiveness of self-awareness is somewhat more complicated, and it seems to have troubled Ibn Sīnā himself, not to mention his contemporaries. Given his commitment to the idea that all immaterial things are intellects by essence,[20] it seems plausible that self-awareness is due to an act of intellection, albeit one that never ceases for as long as we exist. And if that is the case, then self-awareness may be epistemically primitive in a weak sense, in that I am not—and can never be—aware of performing the cognitive act that makes me aware of myself, but not in the strict sense, for it can be explained by means of more basic epistemic concepts. Although this possibility contradicts the statements we have seen him make in *The Notes* and the *Remarks and Admonitions*, and although it gives rise to a number of problematic consequences (for instance, intellection concerns universals, whereas selves are particular), Ibn Sīnā entertains it in *The Discussions*, no doubt spurred by the suspicions his students and critical interlocutors felt in the face of the novel concept.[21] Unfortunately, he does not arrive at a definite answer,[22] but it is noteworthy that even in this context he leans toward the idea that

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20 See, for instance, Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, 146; and *Shifāʾ: al-Ilāhīyāt*, ed. M. E. Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), VIII.66–68, 284–85.

21 See, for instance, Ibn Sīnā, *Mubāḥathāt* V.278–85, 117–19; and VI.892, 318. For a tentative reconstruction of Ibn Sīnā's concept of self-awareness as the intellection of a singular concept of oneself, see Deborah L. Black, "Avicenna on Individuation, Self-Awareness, and God's Knowledge of Particulars," in *The Judeo-Christian-Islamic Heritage: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. Richard C. Taylor and Irfan A. Omar (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2012), 255–81.

22 Indeed, taking his cue mainly from *The Discussions*, Shlomo Pines ended up condemning Ibn Sīnā's concept of self-awareness as all but incoherent. "La conception de la conscience de soi chez Avicenne et chez Abu'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 21 (1954): 21–98.

self-awareness is not an act of intellection but something more primitive: "It may be that 'intellection' [in the sense of] the grasp of intelligibles is not applicable to the purity of complete self-awareness but rather subsequent to it. That is worth thinking about."[23] Perhaps Ibn Sīnā's hesitation in *The Discussions* signals that his thinking was subject to development, and that the material in *The Notes* and the *Remarks and Admonitions* represents a later stage at which he was convinced of this view.[24]

If there is one question the modern reader will ask at this point, it must be whether Ibn Sīnā was willing to grant self-awareness to nonhuman animals. The concept that we have been investigating would certainly not commit him to this, intimately related as it is to the immateriality of the human self, which is precisely the feature that distinguishes us from animal souls. But Ibn Sīnā's explicit remarks on the topic are not quite as straightforward: He sometimes boldly states that nonhuman animals are aware of themselves, only to voice his suspicion in other places.[25] In recent scholarship, tentative consensus has emerged in favor of the view that some kind of self-awareness is embedded in animal perception due to the operation of the faculty of estimation.[26] But there is no pure first-personality in nonhuman animals; instead, the animal is aware of itself only in the sense that it perceives its objects as concerning itself, or as something in which it has a vested interest. Ibn Sīnā's paradigm case is the sheep's perception of

23 Ibn Sīnā, *Mubāḥathāt* V.288, 119.

24 For this possibility, see Meryem Sebti, *Avicenne: L'âme humaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000), 116–17; and Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy*, 101–2.

25 Compare, for instance, Ibn Sīnā, *Shifā': al-Nafs* V.4, 254, and *Ta'līqāt*, 161, with *Mubāḥathāt* VI.657, 221.

26 See Jari Kaukua and Taneli Kukkonen, "Sense-Perception and Self-Awareness: Before and after Avicenna," in *Consciousness: From Perception to Reflection in the History of Philosophy*, ed. Sara Heinämaa, Vili Lähteenmäki, and Pauliina Remes (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 95–119; Luis Xavier López-Farjeat, "Avicenna on Non-Conceptual Content and Self-Awareness in Nonhuman Animals," in *Subjectivity and Selfhood in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Jari Kaukua and Tomas Ekenberg, Studies in the History of Philosophy of Mind 16 (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2016), 61–74; and Ahmed Alwishah, "Avicenna on Animal Self-Awareness, Cognition and Identity," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2016): 73–96.

the wolf as hostile, where the sheep must perceive the wolf's hostility to be specifically directed at *itself*, as opposed to a merely neutral observation. Yet if this much is granted to animal souls, as corporeal entities they lack the capacity to reflectively focus on their self-awareness. The faculty of estimation can never take its own operation as object, because the lobe of the brain in which it resides cannot fold upon itself as a whole—the closest resemblance of genuine self-relation available to a corporeal entity is a relation between its parts.

An inherent opacity thus distinguishes nonhuman animal subjectivity from ours. It is also questionable whether animal subjectivity, embedded as it is in the ceaselessly fluctuating objective content of its experiential life, can have the sort of constancy that we have seen Ibn Sīnā ascribe to human self-awareness. But tantalizing as these questions are, there is frustratingly little evidence for their definitive solution in Ibn Sīnā. As is often the case with pioneering thinkers, he seems to have lacked the opportunity to follow through all the consequences of his new idea.

3 Ibn Sīnā's Heritage

In the later Islamic tradition, Ibn Sīnā's substance dualism becomes mainstream philosophical anthropology, and as a consequence, arguments revolving on self-awareness abound in postclassical literature. But this does not mean that they cease to be debated and developed. In the first half of the twelfth century CE, the Jewish philosopher Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. 1164/5) spells out a number of difficult consequences that remained implicit in Ibn Sīnā. For instance, supposing that self-awareness is the mode of existence of the human soul, one would expect that *all* the soul's life-giving functions would fall within its scope. In other words, not only would we be constantly aware of our perceptions and thoughts, which one might accept with relative ease, but also of such soul-governed processes as the growth of our hair! In order to accommodate these consequences, Abū l-Barakāt was bound

to connect the concept of self-awareness with considerations of attention, the temporality of experience, and the relation of parallel psychological processes to a single phenomenal awareness.[27]

For another example, Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1635/6) employs all of Ibn Sīnā's arguments but denies the supposition of an unchanging substantial core to self-awareness. Instead, he argues that my subjectivity is inseparable from the mental content of my experience, and that the constancy of self-awareness should not be attributed to any momentary instantiation of my being but rather to my stream of consciousness as a temporally extended continuity.[28] Ṣadrā also claims that the independence of mental processes from their corporeal correlates is more radical than Ibn Sīnā believed, and that at least imagination can function without the body. One striking consequence of these ideas is that animal self-awareness becomes very similar to ours—Ṣadrā even recasts the flying man as a flying animal.[29]

A different way of building on Ibn Sīnā's insights is exemplified by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191 CE), who found radically new applications for self-awareness in his introduction of the concept of presential knowledge (*ʿilm ḥuḍūrī*, *ʿilm bi-l-ḥuḍūr*) and the new metaphysical system based on the concepts of light (*nūr*) and appearance (*ẓuhūr*). Both of these moves are based on Ibn Sīnā's concept and arguments, which Suhrawardī has uprooted from their psychological context, employing them as cornerstones of a novel metaphysics that is still recognized as a serious alternative to Avicenna's peripateticism.[30]

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27 Jari Kaukua, "Self, Agent, Soul: Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's Critical Reception of Avicennian Psychology," in Kaukua and Ekenberg, *Subjectivity and Selfhood in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, 75–89.

28 Jari Kaukua, "A Closed Book: Opacity of the Human Self in Mullā Ṣadrā," *Vivarium* 52, no. 3–4 (2014): 241–60; and Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy*, 192–227.

29 Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy*, 164–67.

30 For a detailed analysis of Suhrawardī's application of Ibn Sīnā's concept of self-awareness, see Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy*, 125–54.

The early scholastics were exposed to Ibn Sīnā's concept of self-awareness by the Latin translation of the psychological section of *The Cure* at the tail-end of the twelfth century. Although the flying man was received with considerable enthusiasm by the first few generations of Ibn Sīnā's readers, the excitement seems to have cooled down the further we get into the fourteenth century.[31] An interesting feature of the flying man's reception in medieval Latin literature is a shift from an "ontological" to an "epistemological" interpretation of the argument.[32] This means that the Latin readers initially employed the flying man for the same purpose as Ibn Sīnā, namely as an argument for psychological substance dualism, whereas later authors perceived it as evidence for the immediacy of self-knowledge. While the latter concern is obviously not alien to Ibn Sīnā—as we have seen, one of the features of his concept of self-awareness is precisely its immediacy, or epistemic primitiveness—the flying man was not his primary means of arguing for this claim. If anything, this purpose was served by the argument against the reflection model of self-awareness, which the Latin readers did not have at their disposal.

The argument from the unity of experience is known to have been subject to heated debate in the early modern period.[33] Although Ibn Sīnā's role in this history is not clear,[34] it is quite possible that the extended discussion in chapter V.7 of the psychological section of *The Cure* was an important conduit. In this regard, mention should also be made of the question of whether the flying man may have inspired Descartes's cogito. The similarities between the two arguments are considerable,

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31 The early reception is charted in Hasse, *Avicenna's "De Anima" in the Latin West*, 80–92.

32 The terms are from Juhana Toivanen, "The Fate of the Flying Man: Medieval Reception of Avicenna's Thought Experiment," *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 3 (2015): 64–98.

33 For an overview, see Thomas M. Lennon and Robert J. Stainton, eds., *The Achilles of Rationalist Psychology* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2008).

34 See Henrik Lagerlund, "The Unity of the Soul and Contrary Appetites in Medieval Philosophy," in *The Achilles of Rationalist Philosophy*, ed. Thomas M. Lennon and Robert J. Stainton (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 74–91, who unfortunately all but neglects the argument's extended version in *The Cure*.

but as has been noted,[35] so are the differences. Furthermore, no definitive textual connection has been established between Descartes and Ibn Sīnā. The medieval tradition may have provided a bridge, but this possibility remains to be corroborated by concrete evidence.

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35 See, especially, Thérèse-Anne Druart, "The Soul and Body Problem: Avicenna and Descartes," in *Arabic Philosophy and the West: Continuity and Interaction*, ed. Thérèse-Anne Druart (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1988), 27–48.